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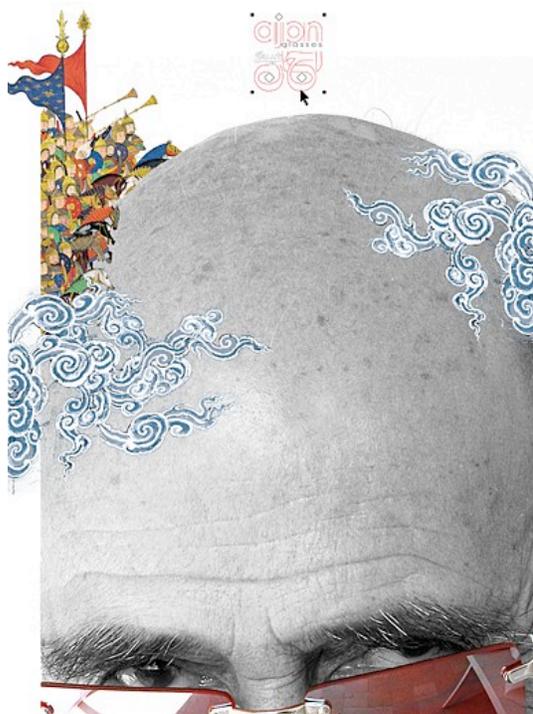
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Looped and Layered



Siamak Filizadeh, *Bread, Cheese & Image*, 2007

By LEILA DARABI in New York | 4 June 2009

[TEHRAN BUREAU] There are two kinds of Iranian art often exhibited in the West: artifacts of the ancient empire and modern works of the diaspora. On display now through July 10th at the [Thomas Erben Gallery](http://thomaserben.com/) in New York City is another view of the Iranian art world —that of a dozen contemporary artists all currently living and working in Tehran.

These are the artists who never left; and their work shatters more than a few stereotypes. You won't find any idyllic scenes of kings and maidens in miniature gardens or sad-faced

portraits of women in veils.

Instead, the fourth-floor Chelsea gallery bursts with sound, image and movement. In one corner lies a pile of fiberglass and paper crows by [Bita Fayazzi](http://thomaserben.com/#bioFayazzi); on a nearby wall the work of graphic artist [Siamak Filizadeh](http://thomaserben.com/#bioFilizadeh) mashes classical and commercial images in large-scale works reminiscent of Dada collage; a triptych of monitors on a far wall display slow and sensually choreographed scenes of traditional wrestling by video artist Sadegh Tirafkan.

"I didn't want to show what the Iranian diaspora wanted to see and I didn't want to show what the New York audience expected," says Erben, describing his approach to curating *Looped and Layered: Selections of Contemporary Art from Tehran*.

Erben, a German citizen, spent two weeks combing the galleries and artist studios of Tehran before selecting the ten men and two women represented in the exhibition. Guided by word of mouth recommendations and intensive internet research, he found "five or six interesting galleries" and was surprised by the European influence he felt in Tehran as a city.

But despite the cosmopolitan feel of the areas he frequented while seeking new talent, Erben described the Iranian artists he met as largely cut off from the international art world—especially as compared to their European counterparts. While most had shown their work, only a few had done so outside of Iran and only one or two has taken part in international art shows. A few years ago Erben put on a similar show of Pakistani artists. Iran's art scene, he said, "was even more cut off."

How political is contemporary Iranian art? American audiences find it subtle and even subdued, Erben says. Iranians familiar with the political symbols in play find the statements more overt.

Interestingly, only two of the twelve artists represented in *Looped and Layered* are women. Fayazzi, a previous contact who helped introduce Erben to others in the Tehran art scene and the painter Ala Dehghan. "Usually our shows skew the other way," says Erben, who met other Iranian women painters but did not find their work as intriguing as the other pieces that made it into the show.

Erben hopes *Looped and Layered* will serve as a small step in connecting Iran's thriving contemporary art scene with international collectors and curators. "This is a first step," he says, adding that misconceptions and stereotypes feed Iran's isolation and consequently the Iranian art scene. "It's ideologically tinged on both sides."

Looped and Layered: Selections of Contemporary Art from Tehran

Now-Through July 10th

Thomas Erben Gallery

[www.thomaserben.com \(http://thomaserben.com/#start\)](http://www.thomaserben.com/#start)

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